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ABSTRACT

Effective library instruction and library services in rural or small schools often depend upon the personalities of and working relationships between library personnel and the school principal. Confrontations between rural- and small-school principals and library specialists generally fall into two categories of precipitating situation: censorship ordered by the principal to accommodate complaints from parents or school board members, and retrenchment of staff or services due to funding problems. Both categories stem from the same problem, a lack of understanding by the school principal of the library's role in the educational process. This lack of understanding and the resulting communication gap between the principal and librarian come about because administrator education programs seldom cover the role and services of the school library. Thus, the school librarian must take on the responsibility of demonstrating by practical application the value of library instruction and the library itself. Tips to the school librarian for establishing a good relationship with the principal include showcasing the positive aspects of the library program, incorporating possible solutions into any contacts about library problems, making sure that the principal is totally knowledgeable about the library program, and providing various services that make the library indispensable to the school and community. (SV)

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A CRITICAL RELATIONSHIP: RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND LIBRARIANS.

One of the most vital skills to be acquired by elementary or secondary students during their educational experience is that of achieving library competency. Knowing how to effectively use a library is the foundation of education and life-long learning. We are now living in an age of information wherein information, its retrieval and dissemination, is the the major product of America. A district or school that does not include the library and its instructional programs throughout the curriculum is outdated and perpetuating a disservice to students who will face or who are facing vocational and educational decisions.

With exceptions, school districts in populated and urban areas are often not as dependent upon principal/librarian working relationships to achieve effective school library programs as are many rural and small schools. Large, populated districts often have district librarians and/or coordinators who oversee library services in the schools fairly independent of school principals. While the principal is abreast of school library services, he/she seldom makes decisions that change library programs independent of district professionals. The same is not true at the rural and small-school level. Unfortunately, effective library instruction and library services for students in in rural or small elementary and secondary schools is often dependent upon personalities and working relationships between library/media personnel and the principal of the school.

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> The success of educational media in schools depends not so much on the establishment of programs nor the technical expertise of the librarian-media specialist, as on whether school principals are aware of and sympathetic to it. (Carlson, 1965).

Successful working relationships between the principal and the library/media specialist usually result in the library and its instructional programs being an integral part of the school's total educational process.

Too frequently, however, library instruction and school libraries have an insignificant role in a student's education. Often the librarian is partially at fault, sometimes the administrator(s). Both need to work together to establish an effective library program for faculty and students. Without this working relationship, students lose a vital part of their education.

Confrontations between rural and small school administrators and library/media specialists generally fall into two categories. The first involves censorship confrontations in which principals order librarians to remove books from shelves or delete passages or illustrations to accommodate complaints from a parent, patron, school board member, etc.

The second category involves funding. More often than not, the library is the first area in schools to be assessed budget and staff cuts or to be saddled with new duties extraneous to the library's real purpose and function. These duties can be school services or programs felt to be essential by the principal or those which the school becomes obligated by regulation to administer.

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Both of these categories stem from the same problem. Frequently, school principals lack an effective understanding of the role a library has in the educational process.

Often, educational administrators view librarians as technical specialists, not educators, who seem insensitive towards the administrator's job of achieving scholastic and financial balance throughout the school and across the curriculum. Some librarians are viewed as narrowly focused kingdom-builders and libraries themselves as fiscal bottomless pits.

Why the communication gap between library/ specialists and principals? First, in almost every instance, the course work required for school administrators does not include training in the importance of the library's role in society and in the school's curriculum. Graduate administrative programs assume educational administrators have developed necessary research skills along with enough library exposure to make them well aware of the role and services of a school library. However, this assumption is false. Often, the opposite is true. Instruction concerning the functions, standards, budgetary needs, collection and services of a school library are simply not included in the curricula of educational administrative programs.

This lack of library training in educational administration can have a devastating impact on a library's collection, informational services and ultimately, students' education.

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The school librarian must share in the responsibility of a principal's administrative myopia. That is, in the absence of a formal education about the library's importance and operation, the school librarian must not miss any opportunity to demonstrate the value of library instruction and the library itself in practical application.

There are some unique problems when it comes to establishing positive working relationships between principals and library/specialists in rural and small schools. First of all, principals are usually former classroom teachers, not former librarians. They are usually more knowledgeable concerning teaching and classroom needs than in having a working knowledge of the functions and needs of a library. Thus, it is not uncommon for a principal to evaluate the library/specialist by saying, "the teachers tell me you are doing a good job." (Rosenburg, 1978).

A second major problem is the frustration experienced by many library/specialists when they cannot act according to their professional knowledge and standards, under limitations placed upon them by their school principals. With limited personnel in rural and small schools, librarians are often called upon to spend a major part of their time performing tasks having no relevancy to library instruction, collection development, faculty involvement, library promotion and numerous other essentials of an effective library program.

How to remedy these situations? First, library/media specialists need to initiate the changes. (Lyones, 1979). Professional librarians at the K-12, college, and university levels need to take necessary steps to assure that the graduate programs

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in education and possibly other fields of study in their respective institutions or in their communities, should include the role and services a library offers. If possible, they should work towards having a library science course inserted in the administrative curricula. Many graduate deans have propensity for encouraging research in their subject areas and may be more open to a library course offered at the graduate level than librarians realize.

Secondly, if a library course cannot be added to an educational administration curriculum, librarians need to ask for the necessary time to meet with such classes as guest speakers, specialists, or whatever is necessary and provide necessary library instruction and exposure. Something is far better than nothing. Well organized presentations need not be extensive and a class period or two can be of significant value to future administrators to acquaint them with the importance of having an active library program in their schools. Thus, the approach to include library services to schools and communities in the curricula of educational administration classes is a very valid one and it remains for the librarians in the field to initiate such efforts.

Third, the library/media specialists in the schools need to establish a positive relationship with their principal. Again the library/media specialist should make the first move to establish good relations, and to inform the administrator(s) about library policies. This is best done by explaining to the principal the scope and purpose of the library. **Far too often the most frequent communication between the librarian and school principal concerns the needs of the library or a library problem.**

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The following are some basic rules which every library/media specialist should incorporate into their relationship with school administrator(s). (Weisburg and Toor, 1988). It is worthwhile for both the principal and the librarian to be aware of them.

1. Probably most important, is to contact the administrator(s) frequently when there are positive aspects of the library's program to show and tell them. See that they come to the library often and acquaint them with the many valuable services and accomplishments of the library as well as various classes using the facility.
2. Never contact the principal concerning a library problem without having thought of some possible solutions. Principal(s) will appreciate the insights of a protessionål in the field.
3. Keep the principal informed so he/she is totally knowledgeable concerning the library and its programs. The librarian should be viewed as a positive source of information.(Howland, 1979).
4. Ask for advice in those situations in which there is no clear direction.
5. Establish the library/media specialist and the library as an indispensable cog in the school's educational picture. The following are some proven methods by which this can be accomplished:
   A. Teach library skills to students and adapt the library to their needs.
   B. Include faculty and administration whenever possible in library programs and services

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C. Work closely with faculty to order materials in their subject areas.

D. Use faculty as subject specialists whenever possible.

E. Help faculty and administrators prepare audio-visual materials for instructional use.

F. Be active in curriculum decision making.

G. Be familiar with school policy.

H. Be aware of school and district financial situations.

I. The library/media specialists should be personally visible. Attend faculty meetings, conferences, and workshops. He/she should be an active participator in the educational process.

J. If possible, provide library services to the community in which the school resides.

This brief overview of a critical area of students' education has been addressed because it is so dependent upon working relationships. Would that effective library instruction and services could be integrated in the curriculum in such a way that they would flow naturally as do core subject areas. Yet all subjects are impacted by the library's collection, services, and students' research skills. A positive working relationship between principals and library/media specialists must be a reality in every school, and especially in schools with limited enrollment and personnel as is often found in rural areas.

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